

Coffee and Contemplation by Musical_Trash

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Canon Divergence, F/M, Flashbacks, Legit everyone from Stranger Things appear at some point or another, Made up back stories, Slow Burn, Thank you David Harbour for this idea, goes from past to present to future and back, I'll try my best to stick to canon, more tags to come, slight PTSD

Language: English

Characters: Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Stranger Things), Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington, Will Byers

Relationships: Eleven/Mike Wheeler - implied, Jonathan Byers/Nancy Wheeler, Joyce Byers & Jim "Chief" Hopper, Joyce Byers/Jim "Chief" Hopper, Joyce Byers/Lonnie Byers - past, Karen Wheeler/Ted Wheeler - implied, Steve Harrington/Nancy Wheeler

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Summary:

Joyce Byers and Jim Hopper go way back. All the way back to high school when Joyce was known as Joyce Reynolds instead of Joyce Byers, before The Upside Down, before Will was taken, before any of that crazy entered her life. They had been on a journey of being friends, to being something almost more than friends, to acquaintances, to friends again, to lovers, to awkward friends, and to bitter acquaintances. But ever since she worked with him to find Will, Joyce found herself reminiscing and wondering....

"What if we tried again?"

1. Present - 1983

Author's Note:

Hey guys! This is my attempt on writing slow burn, kinda angst you romance for my favourite "Stranger Things" couple Joyce/Jim. I really REALLY fell in love with the show and with these two, and was a bit saddened to find very little fanfiction about them so I decided to write my own!

So far this is unbeta'd, but I'll try to do my best to keep this grammatically correct!

Please leave a comment or a kudos, I need motivation :)

CHAPTER ONE : PRESENT - 1983

Joyce Byers couldn't believe that her lost son was found, and that she was holding his hand as he slept soundly in his hospital bed, safe and sound. It felt as though it was all just a sweet dream, that she had dozed off on her ratty, yellow couch, and she would wake up to find herself back in the hell that had been her life for the past few days.

Tears welled up in her eyes as Will twitched in his sleep, his brow creasing. Silently, those tears slowly slid down her cheeks, and she quickly wiped them away with the sleeve of her sweater. With each teardrop, Joyce could feel the stress and anxiety she had been battling with wash away, and her entire...being became lighter. Will faintly whimpered as he gave another twitch.

"No," he mumbled, pure fear in his voice. Quickly, Joyce pulled one of her hands away from her son's and, instead, placed it on his forehead.

She leaned in, whispering into his ear, "Shhhh, honey. I'm here. You're safe. I won't let anything get to you." Instantly, Will relaxed into the mattress, the frown on his face releasing and turning into a

more tranquil expression. She placed a soft kiss on his forehead and leaned back into her chair, her back cracking slightly as she did so.

The only sounds that she could hear was the reassuring sound of Will's heartbeat from the monitor, and the sound of his breaths. Joyce was unashamed to admit that she would often watch her son's chest rise and fall to reassure herself that he wasn't going to...disappear on her again. She wouldn't be able to handle the grief the second time around.

After making sure one last time that yes, Will was alive, Joyce settled back in her hard wooden chair she had pulled up by the bedside. She shuffled around, trying to get comfortable as she attempted, for the umpteenth time that night, to get to sleep. The truth was, Joyce had been having troubles sleeping. With the things she saw and the amount of sleepless nights she spent trying to contact Will while he was in that place ("The Upside Down," was what Mike, Lucas, and Dustin referred it as), who could blame her? She was constantly plagued with nightmares of finding her son in The Upside Down, lying there, seemingly dead, with something lodged into his throat. The monster was another constant plaguing her night terrors. She often found herself running away from it down a long, abandoned road, with her sons right at her side, their hands clasped tightly together.

Joyce gave an unspoken prayer as she tried to settle in for the night. She began to drift off, waiting to be taken to whatever heaven or hell her mind came up with, when a sharp knock on the door snapped her awake. "Come in," she cried out, straightening up in her chair and trying her best not look annoyed at whoever interrupted her sleep.

Chief Jim Hopper pushed the door open and walked in with heavy steps. She gave him a faint smile in lieu of greeting. "I just...wanted to check on you and the kid," he grunted out. "Would've come earlier but I had to finish up some things down at the station...." He trailed off, staring at her in the eyes. Joyce suddenly felt vulnerable, like he was reading her like a book once he stared into her eyes. She looked away.

"You know I don't like it when you stare at me like that, Hop," she muttered.

He gave a faint chuckle as he stepped closer to Will's bed. "Yeah, you never did like that, even when we were kids," he reminisced. She gave another small smile at his statement.

"I've always wondered," she started saying, but then she stopped abruptly, hesitant to finish her sentence. She could feel his eyes piercing her with his stare. He said nothing, and just stared. She turned and looked him in the eyes again, trying to convey the rest of her sentence with just her eyes.

"Me too," he replied shortly, and, for once, he broke eye contact first, and stared down at Will. But Joyce didn't look away.

All Joyce did was stare at her old friend, someone who knew her since they were young and foolish. His stupid cowboy hat, that Joyce had given to him more than two decades ago, sat perched upon his head. The wide brim of the hat cast a shadow on his face, concealing his features and expression from her eyes.

And as she stared, she reminisced.

2. Past - October 1958 and November 1983

Notes for the Chapter:

All characters and the dialogue in the second half of the chapter belongs to Netflix and the Duffer Brothers.

CHAPTER TWO: PAST – OCTOBER 24TH, 1958

Seventeen-year-old Joyce Reynolds sighed as she took another puff of the cigarette she stole. The soothing sound of the rain pounding on the grey sidewalk and the white bleachers relaxed her tense body posture. She was sitting under the bleachers out on the field of the school, stewing over her recent fight with her boyfriend, Lonnie. To be honest, she didn't even remember what the fight was about, but she knew she had to take some time away from him to cool down. He didn't mind. It was all a part of their normal life. One second, the two of them were getting along great, and the next, they were at each other's throats. Her friends were a little worried that Joyce and Lonnie wouldn't last ("Please don't break up with Lonnie, Joyce. What if you have nobody to go to prom with?" her best friend, Karen, had asked.), but Joyce wasn't worried. She and Lonnie agreed that the fighting was a sign of their passion, their love. Besides, they always got back together in the end, and that was what mattered most right?

"Hey, what are you doing here?" she heard a deep voice ask from behind her, startling her. She turned around and glared at the intruder. It was Jim Hopper, golden boy of Hawkins High School, her co-worker at the local diner, and her next door neighbor. While she and Jim never interacted at school, they always talked to each other at work or at home. It seemed that they actually had a lot in common and they also had the same sense of humor. And so, they decided that they were...friends? Acquaintances? Was there a word that could describe Joyce and Jim's "relationship?"

No.

"You know why I'm here," Joyce sighed, dropping her cigarette on the ground and stamping it out on the muddy ground.

"Lonnie?" he asked knowingly. She nodded, brushing a hair over her ear. "Figured. I asked him where you were and he told me that you two had a fight, and you stormed off. Knew I'd find you here." His normally styled black hair fell flat around his face, soaking wet from the torrential downpour of rain. His brown sweater and light blue jeans were also wet

He always knew where to find her.

The pair fell silent for a few moments, Joyce kicked at the ground slightly and Jim just stared at her.

Finally, she looked up and asked, "Why were you looking for me?"

"Just wanted to know if you're coming to work today," he grunted, looking away from her and instead setting his piercing gaze on the dirt ground. "If you are, I can offer you a ride."

Joyce gave a small smile and let out a short breathy laugh. "Thanks, but...I'm not going in today. I've got to study for the science test. If not, Ratliff's gonna have my ass." Jim let out a sharp laugh.

"Understandable. Want me to let Lenny know?" he asked, stepping away from her.

"Yeah, that would be great," Joyce replied, giving him a smile. He waved a goodbye and then left. She stared after him as he ran back across the small meadow that connected the field and the school together.

Jim was someone Joyce trusted. In fact, she trusted him more than she trusted Lonnie. She didn't trust Lonnie as far as she could spit. Lonnie was seen as a respectable, smart young man to the adults of the small community of Hawkins, Indiana; but to those who knew him, Lonnie was the complete opposite. He had a high temper, bullied those he saw as "inferior" and "beneath him," and did not care for anybody except himself.

And Joyce knew that he probably didn't even give a damn about her.

But she didn't have the strength to bring herself to care; because for some reason, she loved the asshole. She loved everything about him, and she didn't know how to stop. She learned, after the three long years of being in a relationship with Lonnie, that he would never change his ways, and so she just accepted that. For the past three years, she categorized her life as "Before Lonnie" and "After Lonnie."

("You know, Joyce, you've changed ever since you started dating Lonnie," Jim had once said to her with a slightly...bitter tone.)

Her fingers twitched as she found herself longing for another cigarette.

Joyce stared back at the school, debating on whether or not to return and make amends with Lonnie, or if to just head back home without speaking to him.

("Just get the hell home, Joyce," Jim's gruff voice whispered in her head. "If he isn't walking around trying to find you, he probably doesn't want anything to do with you at the moment. Go home.")

Her Inner Jim was right. If Lonnie wasn't trying to find her, then he didn't want to see her.

With her resolve hardened, Joyce stomped out from underneath the bleachers and cursed quietly to herself. She was supposed to catch a ride with Lonnie! Maybe she could actually take up Jim's offer for a ride....

She ran out to the school, lifting her cheap, faux leather backpack over her head to protect herself from the deluge, and started running towards the nearly empty parking lot, spotting Jim's small, black Chevrolet parked under a tree.

"Joyce! JOYCE!" a loud voice yelled at her from a small distance away, stopping her in her tracks. Joyce slowly turned around to face Lonnie's livid face staring out at her from the school building. They engaged in a staring contest; Lonnie's stare demanding her to come to him, Joyce's refusing. With a huff of frustration, Lonnie marched out angrily into the rain and walked straight towards her.

"Where were you?" he inquired, irritation seeping through his tone. His brown eyes were narrowed as he looked into her wide ones.

"I was underneath the bleachers, letting off some steam," she told him, struggling to remain patient. Joyce knew that she shouldn't anger him any further, but her temper was at its limit. She was going to lash out at some point if Lonnie didn't leave her alone, and that would lead them into another explosive fight.

"Letting off some steam?" he asked vehemently. "I've been looking everywhere for you! If you want space, just fucking say so, Joyce! Just let me know where you are! Jesus Christ, I can't play hide and seek with you every time we fight! I don't have time for that!"

"Well it's not hard to fucking find me, Lonnie!" she exploded back at him. "It's not like I ran off into the woods! I was under the bleachers! If you were trying even a little bit, you would have found me! Jim did!" And that was when Joyce knew she made a mistake.

Lonnie's nostrils inflamed and his already dark eyes darkened. Joyce bit the inside of her lip.

("You really did it now," Inner Jim groaned inside her head.)

It was known to all of Hawkins High that Jim Hopper and Lonnie Byers were rivals of some sort. They were always battling for the top place in classes and athletics, but there was an underlying animosity between them that went beyond being "just rivals."

Joyce could never figure out why they hated each other so much.

"Hopper?" Lonnie ground out between gritted teeth. "That fat pig, Hopper?"

"He is not a fat pig," Joyce snapped at him, but then she reeled back a little.

Why am I defending Jim?

Lonnie gave a sharp, bitter laugh. "Fine, Joyce. Go defend him, like you always do! Have fun walking home." He stomped away, heading back to the school. Joyce bubbled in anger.

How dare he?

She couldn't stand the way that he made everything her fault. How he always made small things a big deal, causing them to have arguments. How he was so bipolar, being all sweet and nice to her in one moment, and biting her head off the next.

She couldn't stand the fact that she still loved him.

With a huff, Joyce stomped out of the parking lot and away from the school, heading back to her home. She stewed over her situation with Lonnie, debating on whether or not she should break up with him or if she should wait to see if he grows up, matures, and changes his behavior.

She never saw Jim Hopper staring after her from the inside of his car.

Joyce groaned at the sound of her parents' favourite opera record drifting upstairs. Contrary to her parents' belief, sopranos reaching glass-shattering octaves did not help her concentrate on her science homework. The last time Joyce had not finished her homework, she had received a whack on her palms from a ruler.

("Ratliff's a piece of work," Inner Jim grumbled.)

She huffed out a laugh in agreement to Inner Jim as she started writing out some equations. Faintly in the background, she heard the ringing of the house phone. She sighed and got up, heading to the light blue phone on her bedside table. But as soon as she reached out to pick up the handle, the ringing stopped. Her mother must have answered the phone. Joyce turned to head back to her desk when she heard her mother shout.

"Joyce! It's for you!"

Thinking it was going to be Karen, Joyce prepared to endure hours upon hours of gossip as she picked up the phone handle, and answered, "Hello?"

“Joyce, it’s me.”

“...Lonnie?” she asked, disbelievingly. Lonnie rarely ever called her, especially not so soon after a fight.

“Yeah,” he answered simply, awkwardly.

“Wh-why are you calling?” she queried, wondering inwardly if this was all a dream.

He sighed heavily over the phone. “Listen, Joyce,” he said, sounding...apologetic? No. It couldn’t be. “I just wanted to say that I’m sorry for the way I reacted today, especially out in the parking lot. You know I just...hate...that Hopper kid, and I hate how you have to...hang around him all the time. I know you don’t hang out much at school, but.... Just. I’m sorry. It was wrong of me, and I shouldn’t take out my anger on you when you don’t deserve it.” The entire speech was awkward and stilted, but Joyce could feel his sincerity.

This. This was why she loved him. The little moments where he showed his true self, the man Joyce knew that Lonnie could be. Kind, gentle, caring, loving, etc.

She found herself smiling. No words came out of her mouth.

“Joyce? You still there?” Lonnie asked tentatively.

“Yeah, I’m here,” Joyce said.

“Do...you forgive me?”

“Yes, Lonnie. Of course I do.”

“I know you have one of Ratcliff’s crazy hard tests tomorrow, so I’ll let you go,” he said to her, his voice brightening a bit. “But I’ll make this all up to you tomorrow, Joyce. I promise.”

“All right,” she replied, her smile widening. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Bye.”

“Bye.”

A click.

She knew there was a reason why she chose Lonnie.

PAST – NOVEMBER 7TH, 1983

Forty-two-year-old Joyce Byers (née Reynolds) sat ramrod straight in the chair opposed Chief Jim Hopper’s in his office. Alone, she felt all wired up and in a panic.

Where’s Will? Where’s Will? I need to find him! Will. Will. Will. WillWillWillWillWillWillWillWill-

“Mornings are for coffee and contemplation,” she heard Hopper’s rough voice say in the background. She instantly felt a little relieved and relaxed. Hopper would help her. He had to! He was the goddamn chief! And....

He was her friend.

Keyword: was.

She took a drag from the cigarette in her hand and winced as she momentarily let her mind stray to the incident that had broken their friendship....

'Will is missing!' her subconscious screamed at her, snapping her out of the haunting memories.

“Coffee and contemplation, Flo!” she heard Hopper say loudly as his footsteps sounded towards his office. Once she heard the abrupt stop to his footsteps, Joyce turned around and stood up quickly staring at him with wide panicked eyes. He stood there, staring at her with no expression on his face, holding a donut in one hand.

“Jim,” she muttered anxiously, hoping to convey how important it

was that he listened to her worries and helped.

“Joyce,” he greeted her curtly. He took the cowboy hat off his head and placed it on a coat rack that was near his desk. He sat down and, after placing his donut on a pile of papers, began to fill out a form.

“I have been waiting here for over an hour, Hopper,” Joyce told him anxiously, staring at her watch to double check the time. He sighed deeply and looked at her, lifting both his hands from the typewriting in an ‘I-surrender’ pose.

“And I apologize again,” he told her, his tone was polite, but in a forced way. But Joyce didn’t care.

“I’m going out of my mind!” she whined slightly. She was at a loss as to what to do. All she wanted was her little boy, safe and sound, back home.

“Look, boy his age, he’s probably just playing hookie, okay?” he told her calmly and matter-of-factly. Joyce shook her head.

“No, not my Will,” she argued passionately. “He’s not like that. He wouldn’t do that.”

Hopper still seemed a bit wary and disbelieving of her claims. Bitterly, her thoughts went out to the things the citizens of Hawkins said about her, and what they *would* say about her once everyone knew Will was missing.

No wonder crazy Joyce Byers lost her kid. Too bad they weren’t put in Lonnie’s care. Now there’s a good fellow.

“Well, you never know,” Hopper cut off her self-deprecating musings. “I mean, my mom thought I was on the debate team, when really I was screwing Chrissy Carpenter in the back of my dad’s Oldsmobile, so....” Joyce felt a strong astute need to change the subject, her stomach twisting at the thought of Jim Hopper and Chrissy Carpenter screwing.

“Look, he’s not like you, Hopper. He’s not like...me. He’s not like...most,” she said pointedly. They both knew what they were like as teenagers. Him...a womanizer. Her...a young girl blinded by her

boyfriend's rare acts of kindness and was willing to turn a blind eye to his horrible personality.

"He has a couple of friends," she continued, "but you know, the kids, they're mean. They make fun of him. They call him names. They laugh at him, his clothes--"

She thought back to those all-too-frequent times where Will would come back home in tears, telling her of the taunts and bullying he received from his fellow schoolmates. Them calling him a faggot.

"*Just like Dad does,*" he once said to her.

It broke her heart.

"His clothes?" Hopper asked with a straight face. But Joyce could detect amusement in his voice, which angered her a bit. "What's wrong with his clothes?"

"I don't know. Does that matter?" she demanded.

"Maybe."

She decided to just change the subject. "Look, he's.... He's a sensitive kid." She felt herself getting choked up over the thought of her Will, her small, sensitive Will, out there by himself somewhere, getting hurt or...worse. She couldn't even bring herself to *think* about what Will might have been going through.

"Lonnie," she sighed. "Lonnie used to say that he was queer. Called him a...fag."

"Is he?" Hopper asked, leaning forwards, sounding interested.

Joyce couldn't believe that Hopper was deciding to focus on *that*.

"He's missing is what he is," she told him sharply. He leaned back in his chair, appraising her. She took a much needed drag from her cigarette.

"When was the last time you heard from Lonnie?" he inquired, going back to business. She sat down.

“Uh, last I heard, he was in Indianapolis. That was about a year ago. But he has nothing to do with this,” she told him. There was a sour taste left in her mouth whenever she talked about Lonnie.

He doesn't want Will.

“Why don't you give me his number?” Hopper asked, ignoring her claims and reaching for a pencil.

“You know, Hopper, he has nothing to do with this. Trust me,” she pleaded with him.

“Joyce, ninety-nine out of a hundred times, kid goes missing, the kid is with a parent or relative,” he told her strictly, his hands accentuating the points in the fact.

“W-what about the other time?” Joyce stammered.

“What?” he asked, seemingly taken aback that she was questioning the statistics.

“You said, ‘ninety-nine out of a hundred,’” she pushed on, her arms moving as she quoted him. “What about the other time, the one?”

“Joyce,” he said softly, trying to interrupt.

“The one!” she accentuated.

“Joyce, this is Hawkins, okay?” he reminded her calmly. She sighed, knowing that he wasn't taking her seriously.

“You wanna know the worst thing that's ever happened here in the four years I've been working here?” he continued, staring right into her eyes, begging her to see sense. She closed her eyes, escaping his penetrating gaze. “Do you wanna know the worst thing? It was when an owl attacked Eleanor Gillespie's head because it thought that her hair was a nest.”

“Okay, fine. I will call Lonnie,” she appeased him a little. “He will talk to me before he talks to-“

“What, a pig?” he cut in nonchalantly. Both of their minds flashed

back to the time when he overheard Lonnie referring him as a pig back in their high school days.

“A cop!” she corrected him.

“Just find my son, Hop,” she begged him, her voice cracking and breaking in her need and anguish. “Find him!”

He just gave her a nod, and she stood up and left his office. As soon as she was outside, Joyce felt the tears slipping down her face as all of the emotions of the day flooded back to her. Waking up and finding out Will was missing, feeling guilty about relying on her eldest son so much and for focusing so much on herself than on her kids, and then seeing Hopper again was like icing on the cake.

Old feelings and new feelings all mingled together, and everything she was trying to avoid and repress about Jim Hopper came rushing back to her, and she just couldn't...handle.

But she had to.

For Will.

Straightening her shoulders and wiping the stray tears from her eyes, Joyce Byers (née Reynolds) walked back to her car with a new resolve.

She was going to find Will, and she would not let her past with Hopper tarnish any chances to find her son.

Notes for the Chapter:

Hello! Sorry for disappearing off the face of the Earth for a little while. I've been busy doing research and watching Stranger Things for the umpteenth time just so I can be as accurate as possible. The next chapter won't take so long to write and upload!

And okay, I want to justify what I have Lonnie's character doing in this chapter. I figured that Lonnie had to be something of a decent guy to Joyce to get her to fall in love with him, marry him, sire him two children, etc. We don't really see a lot of Lonnie in

the show, and when we do, he's mostly a dick. But a lot of where my Lonnie comes from is with that scene where he goes to Hawkins to comfort Joyce, but also be a dick and try to gain some cash. Except my headcannon is that teenage Lonnie is a bit more up and down with his emotions, and him and Joyce have a very toned down, almost Stockholm Syndrome-like relationship. But like much, MUCH toned down. There are a few elements. I hope this is clear for everyone!

Please leave feedback in whatever form you wish! It really motivates me! Thanks!